GRASSROOTS

Aboriginal Business in Alberta

Special Alberta Business Awards of Distinction edition

THE ALBERTA BUSINESS AWARDS OF DISTINCTION

ABORIGINAL BUSINESS – AN INTEGRAL PART OF ALBERTA'S ECONOMY

The Alberta economy continued to perform well in 2007, led by low unemployment rates and strength across all economic sectors.

Many Aboriginal businesses took advantage of the continued strong state of the oil and gas industry and expanded or ventured into the field. Some of those companies are profiled on the following pages.

The contribution of Aboriginal-based businesses to Alberta's economic well-being is a significant one. Aboriginal people represent 5.8 per cent of the province's population according to the recently released Statistics Canada 2006 census data, a 20.3 per cent increase over five years. As the Aboriginal population continues to grow and the birth rate continues to outpace non-Aboriginal rates, its economic impact will also continue to increase. The expansion of training and entrepreneurial programs together with a better educated, youthful population means more Aboriginal-based businesses contributing to the overall economic health of the province.

In this special edition of Grassroots you will find short profiles of companies that exemplify cooperation and initiative, the finalists for the *Eagle Feather Business Award of Distinction* and the *INAC/Aboriginal Workforce Participation Initiative Best Practice Award of Distinction.*

The *Eagle Feather* award honours successful First Nation businesses while the *INAC/Aboriginal Workforce Participation Initiative* award celebrates the efforts of non-Aboriginal companies in partnering with Aboriginal communities.

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada is proud to sponsor these two awards as part of the Alberta Chamber of Commerce's prestigious Business Awards of Distinction, the top business honours in the province.

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Aboriginal Workforce Participation Initiative (AWPI)

AWPI is a program of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada designed to increase the participation of Aboriginal people in the labour market. The federal government is committed to help Aboriginal people build stronger, healthier and more self-reliant communities. AWPI's goal is to educate and inform employers about the proven advantages of hiring Aboriginal people.

AWPI is committed to working with all sectors of the economy in promoting Aboriginal employment. Its partnership strategy brings together employers, the Aboriginal community, and other stakeholders, through partnership agreements that assist employers in the recruitment, retention and advancement of Aboriginal workers. The goal is to remove the obstacles that separate employers and Aboriginal employees, meeting the needs of employers for skilled workers and increasing the opportunities for employment for Aboriginal people.

For further information on this program, please contact:

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THE ALBERTA BUSINESS AWARDS
INAC/AWPI finalist

ATCO ELECTRIC – FINDING THE RIGHT BALANCE

Culture is not simply a matter of traditions or customs. It is a way of looking at life, a set of shared beliefs and values. Recognizing and acknowledging cultural differences can make the difference between a successful and rewarding working relationship and a missed opportunity.

ATCO Electric continues to work closely with Aboriginal communities to better understand their cultures and help balance their traditional way of life with the company's operational needs.

Consultation between employees and First Nation members regarding a 240 kv. transmission line in northwest Alberta

The senior management of ATCO Electric feels it is essential that employees understand the cultural differences as well. As a result, the company developed a comprehensive internal training program in early 2007. Since then, 300 employees – from field staff to senior executives – have taken the training, with another 150 scheduled for 2008.

"We are fully committed to developing lasting relationships based on understanding and trust with Aboriginal communities throughout our service territory," said Sett Policicchio, President, ATCO Electric.

"This commitment guided the development of our Aboriginal policy in 2006 and forms the base of our relationship model."

With the help of the Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation, ATCO Electric developed and refined a new relationship model this past year. The model – inspired from its interaction with several Aboriginal communities in northern Alberta – has proven so successful ATCO Electric is now using it to develop and strengthen its relationships with Aboriginal communities throughout its service territory.

ATCO Electric also developed a project consultation process that ensures best practices are applied consistently, regardless of the size of the project. Through this process, ATCO Electric is building meaningful and productive ties and is always looking for ways to improve its working relationships with First Nations.

"We recognize that employment and training are areas of mutual interest and benefit," said Policicchio. "ATCO Electric sees a lot of value in hiring local Aboriginal contractors whenever possible and developing local expertise in a number of areas."

The company has awarded millions of dollars in brushing contracts to Aboriginal contractors since 2004, and ATCO Electric continues to increase the number of vegetation management plans — clearing, brushing, hazard tree removal, reclamation — it develops with First Nation and Métis contractors.

ATCO Electric works with Aboriginal communities to support improved awareness and understanding of career opportunities. As an example, ATCO Electric and Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation are developing a career pathway program to identify high school students interested in entering the power lineman trade. ATCO Electric also participates in career fairs and other employment and training information efforts with Aboriginal communities.

ATCO Electric is headquartered in Edmonton and employs nearly 1,200 people company-wide, including engineers, accountants, journeymen linemen, technologists and clerical employees. The company has 81 years of experience delivering power to homes, farms and businesses in northern and east-central Alberta, including 27 First Nation communities and six Métis settlements.

144 kv. transmission line between the Cranberry Lake and Wesley Creek substations in northwest Alberta

ATCO Electric

THE ALBERTA BUSINESS AWARDS OF DISTINCTION
INAC/AWPI finalist

ENBRIDGE PIPELINES INC. – A PROUD HISTORY OF PROGRESSIVE ABORIGINAL RELATIONS

Waupisoo pipeline construction in October 2007

Enbridge is a Canadian-based company, with global operations employing over 5,700 staff. From its inception, Enbridge has taken pride in its policy of maintaining respectful relations and ongoing involvement with indigenous people in all its operations. The company is guided by its Corporate Social Responsibility Policy and its Indigenous Peoples Policy. In 2007 Enbridge was honoured for a third straight year by Global 100 as being one of the "Global 100 Most Sustainable Corporations In The World." In addition, Enbridge regularly receives other national and international awards recognizing its leadership role in sustainability, good governance, corporate responsibility and a host of other indicators. Doing the right thing pays dividends!

Here in Alberta, Enbridge Pipelines Inc. continues to promote its corporate philosophy in all development projects they undertake throughout the province. The company is involved with over 40 Alberta First Nations and Aboriginal organizations in partnerships, projects and sponsorships that promote Aboriginal economic development, employment and training, community support and culture activities.

The principles enshrined in the company's Indigenous Peoples Policy commit Enbridge to consultation on traditional values, the land, heritage and the environment, opportunities in education, training, business development and employment. It ensures respect and understanding are foundations in all aspects of interaction with Aboriginal communities and individuals. All of these principles and more are apparent in one of the company's main projects, the Waupisoo oil sands pipeline project. The $500 million pipeline, which runs 380 kilometres south of Fort McMurray to terminals near Edmonton, was named in honour of the Cree chief who made the first known reference to Europeans of the Athabasca oil sands in 1715. From the very beginning of the project, the company has followed its policies and philosophies and has been diligent in ensuring that First Nations - and all stakeholders – have critical input and play an integral role in the project. Ongoing consultation and information sharing through initial contact detailing the project scope, open houses and community meetings paid off handsomely, allowing the company to obtain approval from the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board without the need for public hearings.

Enbridge has established a number of economic development and business agreements with First Nations whose traditional territory will be traversed by the project. To prepare regulatory filings, Enbridge worked with numerous Aboriginal communities to compile and record traditional knowledge. More concretely, Enbridge contributed significantly towards the construction and start-up of the Heart Lake First Nation sawmill and then placed an order for 50,000 skids to be used in pipeline construction. Similarly, a number of First Nations and Aboriginal organizations were collectively contracted for right-of-way clearing, log hauling and reclamation post-construction, contracts totalling more than $11 million. The company has also hired a community skills development specialist and employs an Aboriginal liaison worker for the duration of the project construction.

Heart Lake First Nation sawmill crew

While the Waupisoo pipeline is just one of many projects, the diligence, effort, respect and involvement Enbridge brings to its interaction with First Nation and Aboriginal people are indicitive of a collective and enshrined philosophy that warrants continued recognition for excellence in this aspect of their business.

ENBRIDGE

THE ALBERTA BUSINESS AWARDS OF DISTINCTION
INAC/AWPI finalist

WHISPER CREEK LOG HOMES
– AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO NATIVE HOUSING

In a short five years, Whisper Creek Log Homes has expanded from four employees, a forklift and a Quonset hut to a company that employs hundreds, boasts four corporate facilities in two countries and has constructed over 300 houses. It is impressive growth indeed.

Even more impressive is the company's commitment and desire to work with and employ First Nations and their members. The company works as "Partners in Housing" with a number of First Nations in both Canada and the United States and adheres to the philosophy of "leave more than we take" when it comes to building houses on First Nation land.

One of the company's beautiful log homes

"What this company does is manufacture beautiful modern and energy efficient 'shell' home packages in a variety of styles and sizes," said Jerry Dunn, President and Chief Executive Officer.

"We use a revolutionary manufacturing process that ensures quality and longevity, but the best part is that much of the employment and savings realized in site preparation, set-up and interior finishing remains with the band. The employment and the cost savings remain where they should be with the First Nation - and we're pleased about that."

Whisper Creek Log Homes is headquartered in Utah, with plants in Cardston, Alberta and Mountain Home, Arkansas and a lumber mill in Houston, British Columbia. At their Cardston facility almost half of the staff are Aboriginal – many of them from the nearby Blood Tribe. Of the 80 employees, 31 per cent are women, often working in non-traditional positions such as quality control, production and engineering. First Nation women make up 12 per cent of the workforce, and Whisper Creek has developed a First Nations division dedicated to providing affordable, long-lasting, energy-efficient housing to First Nations people across North America. Currently, the division is made up of three individuals (two are members of the Blackfeet Nation in Montana) but the initiative to focus on Aboriginal organizations and employ members is sparking a lot of interest across the prairie First Nations and beyond.

Dwayne Across The Mountain at work in the Cardston facility

The company has recently completed several impressive projects on both sides of the border. They worked with the Blackfoot in Browning and Heart Butte, Montana to erect 35 of their unique log homes on lots that are nearly an acre each in size.

"The homes are beautiful, modern and an object of pride for the owners," said Blackfeet Tribal Business Council Chair Jay St. Goddard.

"Employment and spending remained within the Tribal Authority, and Whisper Creek has been an excellent company to work with."

This project was recognized for an award by the United Native American Housing Association.

More recently, the Tsuu T'ina Nation has embarked on the erection of 25 Whisper Creek Log homes on traditional land just west of Calgary and the response has been the same. Kudos for the quality of the finished homes and accolades about the company's refreshing approach to Aboriginal housing, along with the special gift of a prestigious buffalo robe, were bestowed by the band.

With sales increasing by $22 million over the last four years and a growing number of partnerships with Aboriginal organizations on both sides of the border, Whisper Creek Log Homes seems poised to continue to grow and prosper. They'll do it using more Aboriginal employment and continued good relations with bands and tribes as "Partners in Housing."

WHISPER CREEK LOG HOMES

THE ALBERTA BUSINESS AWARDS OF DISTINCTION
Eagle Feather finalist

FOX E. TRUCKING LTD.
– ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT DRIVES THIS BUSINESS

Owner and proprietor Eugene Fox always knew he wanted to be an independent businessman from an early age.

Jeremiah Bull Shields with a load of hay for livestock

"The independence and reward of working for yourself, being your own boss, was instilled in me at an early age by my parents and grandparents," said the affable member of the Blood Tribe.

"I quickly figured out you need a strong work ethic, good partners and solid planning before you start up your business."

His wife Kitty has been his partner and co-owner. Together they have built Fox E. Trucking into a profitable business that is now branching out into other ventures in southern Alberta. The trucking business is just one of a number of different professions in which Eugene has excelled. In the course of his working career he has been involved in farming, civil engineering, construction (roads, dams), heavy equipment operation and natural resource management. With his latest business venture, owning Albert's Gas Bar and Confectionary and the Moccasin Flats Store, he adds retail to the many hats he has worn.

Loading gravel on the Blood Reserve

Fox E. Trucking is one of the few native-owned crude oil haulers in the province, and is currently hauling about 40 per cent of production from the Blood Tribe – the largest reserve in Canada – for Plains Marketing Canada Ltd. and Bonavista Petroleum Ltd., with an eye on hauling the remaining 60 per cent in the future. The increase is part of the Blood Tribe's First Nation Oil and Gas Management initiative, which promotes partnerships, economic development and self-governance of oil and gas resources on the reserve. They also haul hay on a regular basis to the Blood Band Ranch and surrounding farms and ranches, as well as in railway containers for export to Japan. Gravel and heavy equipment for construction projects are other materials the company hauls regularly.

The Foxes take pride in the fact many of their drivers are Aboriginal, and all are trained and certified for environmental, health and safety compliance as required by the oil and gas industry. Additionally, all 20 employees in their latest venture are from the Blood Tribe. They advocate providing people with a healthy work environment that presents opportunities to advance, and perhaps follow their own entrepreneurial paths.

They contribute to the native and non-native communities in many other ways. Through their acts of philanthropy, numerous institutions - St. Vincent de Paul, Salvation Army, "Food For Thought" breakfast programs in the schools, "Streets Alive" meal program for the homeless and a host of others - have been the recipients of money, time and services from the company, its owners and employees.

A professional musician, Mr. Fox maintains a music studio in his home and regularly invites his extended family, his band Seven Days In and emerging musicians to play and jam. The Foxes have donated musical equipment to the Medicine Tree Centre, an Aboriginal youth centre in Lethbridge, where people from the community have access to professional instruments.

The success of their business ventures is reflected in their ongoing diversification. The revenue from those operations is continually reinvested: into expansion, to benefit their employees and into the economic growth of the communities where they live and work.

Fox E. Trucking
FIRST NATIONS
BLOOD/BLACKFEET RESERVES
Canada/United States of America

THE ALBERTA BUSINESS AWARDS OF DISTINCTION
Eagle Feather finalist

SAMSON OIL AND GAS INC.
– CREATING EMPLOYMENT AND PROFITS FOR ITS MEMBERS

One hundred percent owned by the members of the Samson Cree Nation, Samson Oil and Gas Inc. has been in operation since 1995. From its original inception as a holding company for the royalties received from gas and oil production on Nation lands, Samson Oil and Gas has evolved into a company actively involved in exploration, production and the service side of the industry.

Based primarily in and around Hobbema, Alberta, the company has partnered with a number of major oil and gas companies - Savanna Energy Services, Canadian Natural Resources (CNRL) and Vast Exploration - in the past to enhance profits and gain valuable knowledge. Now the company and its subsidiaries are continuing to expand their areas of operation and the services they provide, all of which means employment opportunities and financial benefits for the members.

Signing ceremony for partnership with the Flying Dust First Nation

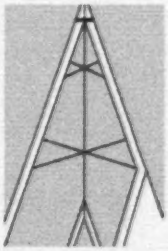
As part of this expansion, Samson Oil and Gas has been involved in ongoing talks with a number of Saskatchewan bands on the potential for development of Treaty Entitlement Lands. In August 2007, they signed an agreement with the Flying Dust First Nation near Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan to begin development of oil and gas opportunities with that First Nation.

Water truck at Bear Drilling Rig Number 5

The service side of the business has also expanded. Samson Energy Services has been operating in Alberta and British Columbia for the past four years providing ancillary service to the industry. They operate four water trucks, a vacuum truck, a fluid hauling truck and a picker truck, hauling treated water, various rig fluids, building ice roads and maintaining CNRL leases within traditional lands.

With the acquisition of an oilfield construction company (Triple-H Construction Ltd.) finalized in late 2007, the Nation and its various businesses are anticipating good things in the coming years. For 10 years Triple-H Construction has been a mainstay near the Pigeon Lake reserve in the heart of the Bonnie Glen field. For decades, the Bonnie Glen field has been one of the largest producing fields in the southern part of the province. Their operations include lease and road construction, reclamation and remediation, pipeline, water and sewage construction and other infrastructure work, all of which promises additional employment training and wealth generation opportunities for the Samson First Nation, as their mandate dictates.

Another key part of their mandate is to contribute, through financial donations and personal involvement, to educational, youth, sports and cultural activities, something the company and its employees do on an ongoing basis. A good example of this generosity is the company's offer of their 40,000 square foot facility to the Hobbema Community Cadet Corps for training, drill formation and a variety of other activities. Community involvement and improvement like this plus an ever-expanding scope of operations bodes well for Samson Oil and Gas and everyone involved.



THE ALBERTA BUSINESS AWARDS OF DISTINCTION
Eagle Feather finalist

PRIMCO DENE GROUP
– EXPANDING THROUGH ONGOING DIVERSIFICATION

The Primco Dene Group of Companies, nominated last year as a finalist for an Eagle Feather Award, recognizing the top Aboriginal-based businesses in the province, is once again a finalist for this award. The nomination is an example of how steady growth and expansion can result in a disparate group of companies sharing a common goal and vision.

CEO James Blackman with some of the EMS fleet

The Primco Dene Group consists of four distinct companies, a couple of limited partnerships and seven joint venture partnerships. They are actively involved in activities as wide-ranging as management consulting, courier and security provision, janitorial and supply purchasing. Medical services, commercial rental and leasing, along with camp maintenance and a franchised lubrication facility are other interests.

"We've got a lot of projects on the go right now," said Chief Executive Officer and Vice-President James Blackman. "While it's gratifying to see the companies grow and prosper, the human side of things is as important as rigid adherence to our five-year strategic plan.

"We give back to the community at large in a number of ways. The well-being of our employees is always foremost in the management team's decision-making processes."

The Primco Dene Group of Companies now employs more than 200 staff, primarily in and around the Cold Lake First Nation but also across Alberta and Saskatchewan through partnerships and joint ventures. This past year has seen a collective growth rate of 60 per cent, with Primco Dene (EMS) LP, showing growth of 70 per cent in equipment and inventory. Attendant sales growth has gone hand in hand, making the company one of the largest providers of medical services to remote site locations in the Lakeland area.

Ever since its inception in 1999, Primco Dene has been actively involved in the communities, providing financial donations and services that assist a number of organizations and activities. Among them are the Cold Lake First Nation Treaty/Heritage Days celebrations, family fun days, golf tournaments, food drives and community holiday celebrations. Ongoing support for sporting and social organizations within the greater community is continuous.

Critical to the company's long-term plans is the improvement and development, through training and association with a number of key Alberta institutions, of their employees. It is an integral part of efforts to ensure their clients and partners are working with staff trained and educated to the highest standards.

"We need to keep our competitive nature as we continue to grow," said Blackman. "At the same time, the education and training we are providing is critical. We're laying the foundation for ongoing prosperity and community well-being and that feels pretty special."

Operations Manager Tammy Charland-McLaughlin outside her office

primco dene

THE ALBERTA BUSINESS AWARDS OF DISTINCTION
Eagle Feather finalist

RKM CONTRACTING LTD.

– TIGHT-KNIT FAMILY COMPANY WITH A FOCUS ON COMMUNITY, SAFETY

For a long time, Reg McLean worked the family farm near Fort Vermilion, in addition to operating a logging and trucking company. Reg retired from farming in 2005 and that year he also re-tooled the focus of the company. RKM Contracting Ltd. has been ably serving the oil and gas industry through road building, hauling, site clearing and logging in the northwestern corner of the province, just as RKM Logging had been doing previously.

Reg McLean making a donation towards a field trip for Assumption School graduates

Grader on road maintenance project for Husky Energy

More important than the name change though, is the care and consideration Reg, Genny and son Kelly have for their heritage (Genny is the daughter and Kelly the grandson of Canada's last hereditary chief – the late Harry Chonkolay), their people (the Dene Tha') and, above all, their employees. It's a family business that goes to great lengths to make its employees feel like a family member.

"People who like their jobs and take pride in their work are the type of people we're looking to employ," said Reg, who graduated with a degree in agriculture from Vermilion College and credits the institution for much of his ambition and drive. "If they're from the area, so much the better. What is important to us as owners is that they are conscientious, safety-minded and enjoy being part of our greater family. A content employee is what we strive for."

The well-being of their employees and the critical role safety plays is evident. Employee movement is low in an industry known for its high turnover, and employees are expected to inspect equipment each and every day to make sure it is in top shape. As the company newsletter (which features a monthly draw for new work boots or coveralls for one of the staff) reminds employees, RKM has a stellar reputation in the industry for having "good iron." They go to great lengths to ensure the various flatbeds, graders, backhoes, cats and specialized equipment (a fleet of almost 100, plus trailers and light towers) keeps that hard-earned reputation. The result of all this diligence and ongoing maintenance is the Work Safe Alberta Award three years running for "exceptional performance in workplace health and safety."

Additional recognition has come in the form of a special award from Alberta Human Resources and Employment for Outstanding Achievement in Health and Safety, 2003-2005, a finalist for the Eagle Feather award in 2001, and Business of the Year in 2003 from the Fort Vermilion and Area Board of Trade. For Reg personally, the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal in 2002 recognized his outstanding contributions to community and Canadians in general.

RKM also contributes significantly to the local economy through donations of time and equipment, using locally made crafts and handiworks as employee recognition incentives, and providing financial support to a wide range of organizations. From minor hockey to junior rangers, from school groups to a foundation honouring the late Kenton Randall, Fort Vermilion's Canadian bareback rodeo champion, the owners of RKM Contracting are respected not only as businesspersons but also as community leaders providing a strong example for future generations.

RKM CONTRACTING LTD

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